

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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PRISONERS OF SILENCE.

By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "A Valiant Ignorance," "A Mere Cypher,"
"Cross Currents," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE softly falling dusk of the August evening was stealing slowly on, filling the room with shadows; the soft night wind floated in at the open window, stirring the curtains and draperies; it was nearly eight o'clock, and still Lady Karslake did not ring for lights—did not even move. She was lying back in a big chair by the window, a rather ghostly-looking figure in a soft white gown; her hands were clasped above her head; her eyes were fixed upon the evening sky, and in their depths there was a light as of intense life, which contrasted sharply with the serene blue, growing more tranquil moment by moment, on which they rested.

To go through life with no sense of its riddle is given only to the very callous and the very dull of fibre. The degree to which man is distressed and rendered restless by its unsolved presence—when once that presence is recognised—is determined by the greater or less predominance in the individual of that mysterious quality which we call "soul," "spirit," "spiritual affinity," each according to our particular formula. Into Eve Karslake's life the sense of that riddle had penetrated, quietly, insidiously, along the most commonplace lines of a perfectly smooth and easy existence. Her husband's death had made no terrible gash in her life, but it had altered her position. It gave her absolute independence. Perhaps to her sensitive and essentially womanly nature independence itself brought with it

a touch of loneliness; certainly it is not possible for any human being to pass on from one phase of existence to the other without a sense, more or less definite, more or less chilling, of the irretrieveableness of time, of the inevitable progress of life, of the inevitable end. Lady Karslake was quite unconscious of any such thoughts; they would have struck her as rather humorous in connection with herself. But they were not without their effect upon her, nevertheless. In the year that followed her husband's death something of her zest of life died out. She learned to know the meaning of the words weariness and satiety. She had begun to ask questions and to get no answers. And the change in her expression was the material result.

It was not in her to accept the new factor in her life and to become in time oblivious of it. It made her restless and wretched. She dealt with it in many ways. She denied it; laughed at it; analysed it. She made sundry attempts to find the answer to it; notable among which was her late philanthropic experiment. But each attempt seemed only a greater failure than its predecessor, and left her, as she had told North Branston, in worse case than before.

And now the haunting riddle was swept out of her life. Not answered; the riddle of life is never wholly answered but by death; but obliterated. The whole condition of life was altered for her. She stood in the midst of a flood of light, that blinded her to the existence of everything but itself. All her faculties, quickened and stimulated as they had never been before, were absorbed in the source of their quickening to the exclusion of any other sense.

Love had come late to Eve Karslake. It had come unsought, unrecognised until it

burst suddenly into full bloom. The old interest in, and sympathy with, North Branston, of the Alnchester days, had stood as it were between her and any knowledge of her development. Their relations in London, had she ever thought about them—and she never did think about them, being by no means a woman of an introspective turn of mind—would have seemed to her merely their Alnchester relations developed as time had developed them both. North Branston had spoken; and, in the flood of realisation which his words let loose upon her, all that had been between them was merged for ever for her in that which was to be.

The supreme woman's impulse, wakened at last, throbbed for the first time in the very maturity of the woman's nature. It thrilled through the whole woman, informing every instinct, every characteristic with itself. It possessed her as only such a temperament can be possessed by love. Every thought, every impulse was concentrated in it. All her previous perceptions were absorbed in it. The pity and the sympathy which he had hitherto created in her were swamped and borne away as by a flood. They belonged to an imperfect state of things; they belonged to the old life of dissatisfaction and regret with which they passed into abeyance. A new heaven and a new earth seemed to have been created for her in which he and she were to dwell absolutely alone, absolutely satisfied in one another.

No woman's soul can pass through such a transformation lightly or tranquilly. To Eve Karslake, the two days which had followed on her realisation had been days of tumult not to be described. Every form of acute feeling possible to such a woman so situated had possessed her and shaken her. Doubt and distrust; distrust of herself; distrust of that other who was to be her world; a quivering dread of that great sea on the brink of which she stood; a burning something too intense for joy, too exquisite for fear; all these ran high in her, and had their way.

Then slowly but surely the first tempestuous tide of feeling began to subside.

Helped by North's temporary absence at Alnchester, her pulses settled gradually into their new beat. She began to live, instead of being tossed hither and thither by the emotion of each moment.

She was waiting for North Branston now, as she sat by her drawing room window with her eyes on the evening sky; waiting

for him for the second time only since he had asked her to be his wife; waiting for him for the first time with perfect satisfaction and unalloyed anticipation. She had received a telegram in the middle of the day saying that he would be detained by professional business until late. She had returned an impulsive answer to the effect that she should wait dinner for him. She had come into the drawing-room shortly after seven, and she had not moved since.

The last light of day faded from the quiet sky, the peaceful glow of summer darkness filled the sky, but the room was in complete shadow. The door opened suddenly, and an electric quiver shot through the womanly figure by the window. With the colour sweeping over her face in one hot, lovely rush, Lady Karslake rose without a word and stretched out both her hands towards the figure coming to her through the dimness. North Branston paused for an instant, almost as though startled. Then, also without a word but with an odd abruptness of movement, he took her in his arms.

She yielded to his touch with a self-abandonment as womanly as it was complete, but as his hold relaxed at last she drew herself away with an involuntary sigh. There had been an intensity in his touch which had made it almost painful. He caught the slight sound instantly.

"I'm too rough," he said, and his voice was harsh and bitter. "I beg your pardon."

She caught his hand and drew it round her, resting softly against his shoulder.

"No," she said, "don't!"

They were only two words, but spoken as she spoke them, they held that which further speech could only have spoiled. She stood so, her whole personality absorbed, as her absolute stillness testified, in the perfect sensation of the moment; and North stood holding her, and looked down at the delicate outline of her face in silence. Perhaps his silence was not what she expected—unconscious as she was of any expectation. Perhaps his touch, deprived of its intensity, seemed vaguely insufficient. After a moment or two she stirred and raised herself. Her voice, as she spoke, low and sweet, seemed to carry with it her intense sense of the newness of the position.

"Did you think I should be glad to see you?" she said. "Have you looked forward to this?"

"Yes!"

His voice was so deep as to be almost

gone and as he spoke the monosyllable one hand closed over the slender white fingers that lay on his breast, holding them as in a vice. The pressure half hurt her, as the force with which his brief response was weighted half frightened her, but she gave herself up to the moment and let its feeling fill her. She looked into his face, the colour coming and going in her own as she breathed, her eyes like stars.

"How strong you are!" she said. "How you hold me! Shall you hold me like this always?"

"Always, so help me Heaven!"

The words broke from North Branston with a vibration which contrasted almost harshly with the tone of the question. A thrill ran through her, and the fingers in his hand seemed to shrink. He released them abruptly, and at that instant the gong sounded. The sound, lightening the sudden strain, seemed to restore Lady Karslake to herself.

"Shall we go down?" she said, in that soft uncertain tone so eloquent of their new relation. They passed out of the dark drawing-room on to the brightly lighted staircase, and she went down before him, her movements swift and nervous in their unalterable grace. He had dined with her often before; but it is one of the mysterious properties of the change which had come upon them, that not the smallest incident of daily life is exempt from that first exquisite mist of the strange and unfamiliar in which the whole is enshrined.

It was not until they were seated at the dinner-table, not until some moments of dinner-table conversation had rendered the position less unreal, that Lady Karslake, glancing towards him with a trivial speech, saw North Branston's face fully for the first time that evening. Having glanced she did not turn her eyes away instantly, and their expression gradually changed.

North was looking white and haggard; dark curves about his eyes gave them an added sombreness. Physical fatigue, so far, might have accounted for his appearance; but it was not the signs of physical fatigue that had arrested Lady Karslake's attention. There was a set defiance about his expression. He looked not like a man satisfied and at rest, but like a man with war in his very soul.

He talked, during dinner, more than did Lady Karslake. A certain absent-mindedness seemed to have fallen upon her. And his talk was the talk of North Branston at his worst; clever, penetrated with cynicism

and pessimism. More than once Lady Karslake put his words aside with a quick expression of distaste; more than once she contradicted him impetuously; and almost directly after the servants had left the room she started up, leaving the dining-room with a rapid word of invitation to him to follow her.

When he joined her in the drawing-room a little later, she was wandering restlessly about the room. She stopped and turned, as he opened the door.

"Come and sit here," she said, "by the window, and tell me how you have thriven at Alnchester."

She had let herself sink into her own chair, as she spoke, not looking at him; and as his voice fell upon her ear she started slightly. Quiet as it was, it seemed to cut like steel.

"I have thriven at Alnchester as I might have expected to thrive! Not at all!"

She turned in her chair and looked at him. Then she said slowly:

"I don't think I understand. Have they not got over your coming to town? Were they not glad to see you?"

A harsh laugh broke from North, though he checked it instantly.

"No," he replied, "they were not glad to see me."

"That was abominable," she said. She had flushed a little. "Were they—" she hesitated, and her colour deepened; "were they not interested to hear your news?"

"No!" said North grimly.

Lady Karslake moved, pulling herself up in her chair with her hands clasped on one of its arms.

"What do you mean?" she said imperiously. "Were they—not pleased?"

"No."

There was something in the one curt word, a suppressed intensity of feeling which had nothing to do with her, before which Lady Karslake paused. She let herself sink back in her chair, the slender fingers of one outstretched hand still clasping its arm, her eyes fixed upon him with an enquiry, half surprised, half displeased, growing in their depths.

"Have you quarrelled with your sister?" she said.

North Branston rose abruptly and stood against the frame of the open French window, looking at her with gloomy eyes that hardly seemed to see her.

"I have," he said, with sudden vehe-

mence. "That's nothing new, Heaven knows. But it's final this time. We've done with one another at last."

"If I am the cause," said Lady Karslake, "I suppose I ought to say that I am sorry."

Her tone was rather curious; there was a sarcastic ring in it that was hardly in keeping with her actual words. North, however, hardly seemed to hear her; he was absorbed in his own thoughts; and after a moment she went on, her hand beating gently against the arm of her chair.

"I did not know that you were so fond of your sister. I did not know that you had so keen a sense of family ties."

He laughed harshly, and the restless movement of her hand quickened ominously.

"Family ties!" he said. "The only family tie I've known has been the curse of my life, that's all. It is not wonderful if my sense of it is keen. Fond of my sister! No, you could scarcely have known that!"

"And yet," she said quickly, "your quarrel with her has spoilt—this evening for you. You are not happy, you can't forget her, you can't get away from your remembrance of what has happened, even with me."

The play of expression on her face, as she lifted it to watch him, was eloquent of the wayward feeling, so inseparable from such a temperament as hers so newly strung to its full pitch. But her expression hardly seemed to penetrate to North's understanding, though he looked down at her with a gaze that seemed for the first time to concentrate itself on her.

"Why do we talk of her?" he said, between his set teeth. "Why do we talk of her?"

Lady Karslake rose and began to move with nervous restlessness about the room.

"I choose to talk of her," she said impetuously. "I choose to understand you. If I am not everything to you, I am nothing. If I am everything to you, what does it matter if you quarrel with a hundred sisters?"

With the inevitable obtuseness of such a man where such a woman is concerned, North Branston failed to understand her drift even then. The chain that he had believed dissolved—that he had defied and repudiated—was dragging on him with an almost unendurable weight; and in some vague and inexplicable way her petulant words seemed to press home that which he was fiercely pushing from him.

"You don't know what you're talking of," he said. "For Heaven's sake let's say no more."

"I do know what I'm talking of," she flashed out tempestuously; "or, if I don't, explain it to me. If the annoyance that your sister causes you is greater than your satisfaction in our meeting, then she is more to you than I am. How else can it be? You want me to believe you love me. You've made me say that I love you. Of what consequence, then, is anything else in the world? How can you be affected by any outside circumstance? How can you be made glad or sorry by anything that doesn't touch ourselves?"

He turned away moodily, leaning his arm on the window frame.

"You will be disappointed," he said gloomily, "if you think of love like that."

She broke into a little ironical laugh.

"You should have told me that before," she said. "We ought to have compared notes on the subject, for evidently we don't agree. What's your idea of love—if mine is wrong?"

He did not answer immediately. His face was dark and cynical, like the face of a man who finds himself goaded when he should have been soothed, and accepts the alternative as part of the irony of life.

"The love of a man and a woman," he said, "may be an island which keeps them from going under altogether, but the sea of care, and failure, and bitterness, is all about it, and the waves beat unceasingly upon its shores. They must make up their breakwaters untiringly, and they must not expect to find the task an easy one."

His words, or his tone, or both, seemed to give the final touch to that jarring of her sensitive emotions begun almost with his arrival. She turned upon him sharply, her eyes flashing.

"We differ wholesale!" she said vehemently. "What I call love is something that annihilates failure, and care, and disappointment; that isolates the two who live in it, and draws them out of touch with the world and all its pains. No other love than this is worth the name!"

She turned away scornfully, and walked blindly to the other side of the room.

There was a moment's pause. North Branston looked at her averted frame heavily and uncertainly; then he passed his hand suddenly over his head, and his whole expression broke up. He strode across the room towards her.

"For Heaven's sake," he said hoarsely,

"don't let us quarrel! We may call things by different names, but there is something at the bottom stronger than our differences. Let us have patience with one another, for pity's sake."

There was a dead silence. He could see her fingers tearing nervously at her handkerchief. At last, slowly at first and almost reluctantly, she turned to him. She lifted her eyes to his, and impulsively stretched out her hands to him as bright tears started.

"Ah, no," she echoed hurriedly and piteously. "Don't—don't let us quarrel! If it is only an island, we are together on it, and we needn't listen—oh, we needn't listen—to the sound of the beating waves!"

CHAPTER XXX.

It was a glaring August day; and Dr. Vallotson's physical discomfort, as he pottered pompously home across the town, by no means tended to restore a serenity of spirit which had been incontinently reft from him.

Mrs. Vallotson's conduct with reference to North Branston's proposed marriage had been accepted by her husband according to his custom; but he had regarded it from the first with an unexpressed disapproval which was by no means customary in their relations. He regarded the connection with Lady Karslake as distinctly advantageous; and a quarrel with North, who had begun to figure rather prominently in his conversation with acquaintances as a distinguished authority, vexed his soul. The facts of the engagement, and of Mrs. Vallotson's violent opposition to it, had crept out in the town; Dr. Vallotson, mentioning the circumstance at home, had done so with a tentative and guilty air which left little doubt as to how the rumour had been started. And the doctor—his wife being absolutely unapproachable on the subject—had the matter mentioned to him on all hands. To find that the view taken by his interlocutors, one and all, was his own view, was, with a man of Dr. Vallotson's temperament, to inflame his opinion into an irritable opinionativeness which was all the more sore and self-conscious inasmuch as practical expression was denied it. On this particular August day an incident had occurred which had put the final touch to that sense of resentment and reprobation which had been swelling in him during the past three weeks; and it was hurrying him

on to an act to which perhaps nothing else could have nerved him.

He pushed open the gate that led into his own garden, heated in body and considerably over-heated in mind, and saw his wife just disappearing through the open hall door. Dr. Vallotson quickened his steps and followed her. Mrs. Vallotson was half-way upstairs when he entered the house, and he went on after her to her room. Just within the threshold he paused, a trifle nervously. Mrs. Vallotson was standing motionless on the other side of the room, with her back towards him.

"Adelaide, my dear——"

Dr. Vallotson had begun with an accentuation of his usual pompousness which might have been intended to conceal a tremulousness which, now that he found himself in his wife's presence, asserted itself; but he was cut short. It had not occurred to him as possible that Mrs. Vallotson should not have heard his step as he followed, but apparently such was the case. At the first sound of his voice she started violently, turning fiercely in the direction from which it came.

"Who is it?" she said roughly. "What is it?" Then as though her jarred perceptions were gradually settling down, she seemed to become aware of her husband's presence, and a flush of violent anger rushed over her face.

"Why couldn't you call me, Robert?" she exclaimed. "What do you mean by coming up behind me like that? Don't you know by this time that I don't like that kind of thing? Are my wishes of any consequence, or are they not?"

The vehemence with which she spoke was so sudden, so unexpected, so extraordinarily disproportionate to the occasion, that for the instant Dr. Vallotson could only gaze at her helplessly, while the resolution with which he was armed trembled in the balance. The instant passed; the flagrant injustice of her indignation added its weight to the charges already formulated in his mind against her; and prudence went to the winds. He drew himself up, inflating his chest portentously as Mrs. Vallotson continued with the same inexplicable passion:

"What do you want? If there's anything you want done, why can't you go to Constance? I can't see after everything. I never get a moment to myself from morning until night. What is it?"

"If you will allow me to speak," returned Dr. Vallotson, with that indignant

trembling of tone which invariably characterised his rare encounters with his wife, "I will explain in a very few words. I merely want a few minutes' conversation with you, and I really fail to see that it is such an unreasonable request."

"Well, go on."

Dr. Vallotson cleared his throat and continued.

"The subject is not a pleasant one," he said, "but I feel it my duty to open it. I cannot longer stand by to watch conduct which I—and not I alone—consider mistaken to the last degree, without offering some slight protest. I—I allude to the matter of your brother's engagement."

As he came at last to the point and stood committed, Dr. Vallotson had grown nervous, flustered, and consequently violent. And as he uttered his last words it seemed as though all the feeling of the moment had passed suddenly from the flushed, furious woman to the little self-conscious, agitated man. As though a sudden pall had been dropped over it, every shade of expression faded from Mrs. Vallotson's face; every trace of the burning colour died away, except where it lingered on her cheeks in two faint patches of red. Her pallor was ashen; there were heavy shadows under her eyes; and, seen thus in repose, there was a drawn fixity of expression in every line of her face. She looked like a woman consumed day and night by some hidden torture, and set to resist its ravages with the last breath in her body.

She turned deliberately away.

"I will not hear the subject mentioned," she said.

Under ordinary circumstances her tone would have terminated the conversation; its only effect now was to add the intoxicating sense of reckless daring to Dr. Vallotson's unusual emotions.

"Pardon me, my dear," he said grandiloquently, "but I have something to say on the subject to which I must request you to listen. I feel that the time has come when we must arrive at an understanding."

"I will not hear the subject mentioned."

She spoke in precisely the same measured, inexorable tone, and the blood began to boil impotently in Dr. Vallotson's veins.

"But the subject is mentioned," he said.

"It is mentioned in every house in Alnchester. Every one in Alnchester is conversant with every detail of the arrangements except ourselves. Something has

occurred this morning which has brought to a point beyond which I cannot suffer it to pass unmentioned the very painful concern under which I have laboured for some time." He paused, reinforcing himself with a wave of his pocket-handkerchief. "I will not attempt to point out to you what my chagrin has been," he continued, "I will not enlarge upon the painful impression produced upon the whole city. I will simply ask you, Adelaide, whether you consider it seemly that I should have to be informed of the date fixed for the marriage of your brother at the hands of one of my own patients!"

Dr. Vallotson's emotion had touched its consummation at last. He had risen to his climax with all that swelling dignity of tone which keen personal sense of humiliation can produce, and he waited majestically for its effect.

No effect whatever seemed to have been produced.

Mrs. Vallotson did not turn round. The mechanical movements with which she was smoothing out her gloves had stopped suddenly, but that was all. At last, when her husband was beginning to doubt whether she had understood his words, she spoke.

"When?" she said.

The word revived Dr. Vallotson's courage. "When?" he returned with pained severity. "When indeed, Adelaide! I have only to ask you what could be more deplorable than the necessity for such a question! It is to take place on the tenth of September. The information comes to me through Miss Baines, who heard it indirectly from Archdeacon French, who is to perform the ceremony."

There was no answer. For a moment Mrs. Vallotson stood absolutely motionless; then the movement of her fingers began again in silence.

The silence seemed to Dr. Vallotson to give him the advantage.

"I feel," he said loftily, "that the deplorable incident forms a crisis, at which it is absolutely necessary that the matter should be represented to you in its true light. I have had some little opportunity of observing how this—this truly deplorable breach between yourself and North Branstons is looked upon by our neighbours, and I cannot but know that your conduct in the matter—dictated in the first instance, as I am well aware, by a high sense of duty—is condemned. It is generally agreed that your original protest is much to be applauded,

but that the time has come for reconciliation."

Dr. Vallotson paused. He was out of breath, and he was also rather nervous. To be allowed to deliver himself without let or hindrance, was not what he had expected. Being prepared for resentment, absolute passivity had disconcerted him strangely; and the end of his speech had been characterised with a conciliatory tone which had developed in spite of himself. He waited a moment, tremulously expectant, but no word or sign came from his wife, even to indicate that she had heard him. He went on persuasively and tentatively.

"The marriage in itself is hardly one which we need deplore," he said. "Indeed, I may say that it is not destitute of advantages. Nor do I see that anything is gained by a quarrel on the subject. It will create one of those family breaches so much to be regretted, but it will hardly influence events. Pardon my reminding you, my dear, that you cannot prevent the marriage."

Again Dr. Vallotson stopped, and again his words were followed by a blank silence. Mrs. Vallotson's lips were compressed to a thin grey line, and the sombreness of her eyes seemed to shut in a sullen, unyielding defiance.

"So what do you think, my love?" continued Dr. Vallotson, with a comfortableness of tone which was not quite so certain or so genuine as it might have been. "Don't you think now that it would be as well to bury the past, and withdraw your opposition? If you were to run up to London and see them—that would be a very pleasant plan, it seems to me. A nice little change like that would do you good. You could, of course, make Lady Karslake understand, if you thought well, what were your first feelings on the subject. And then you might stay in town for the wedding. I dare say Connie would like to go with you."

For the first time since he had introduced the subject, Mrs. Vallotson turned to her husband; turned with a sudden rough force that startled him.

"I dare say she would," she said, in a hoarse, abrupt voice. "But she will have to do without it! You're talking nonsense, and I'm busy!"

"You will not go?"

"No."

There was that in the monosyllable before which Dr. Vallotson's courage oozed away. He did not argue the point.

NOTES ON FAMILIAR FOOD.

We pride ourselves on being an eminently practical people, not logical, not close and accurate reasoners, but plain and matter-of-fact.

Well, let us see how we show our common sense. Our County Councils are now teaching cooking, and very intelligent and clever women are commissioned to show how food is to be cooked. They are usually supplied with the most costly and elaborate apparatus, which only the kitchens of the rich commonly contain; and then the teacher sets forth before women, whose husbands earn a pound a week, the charms of plain cooking—plain enough, no doubt, the chefs of some Dukes would call it, but ridiculously costly and inappropriate withal in any working man's humble abode. Butter and new-laid eggs figure largely, and as the teacher has not to pay for them, she waxes eloquent and insists upon such a lavish use of both, that were her lessons generally acted upon there would soon be a mighty famine in the land. But the poor don't come; the rich can do without such teaching, for others do their work; and only a few ladies in the middle classes with very enquiring minds put in an appearance. "Let the teacher," said a poor woman, "come to my house and show me how to cook there, and then I shall be obliged to her." Here is the test of good cheap cooking—to cook with little money; a small, smoking fire; a miserable oven; a couple of saucepans, and no scales; and sometimes more mouths to feed than food to put into them.

The certainty and rapidity with which the vast population of the United Kingdom is fed is too familiar and taken too much as a matter of course to need any remarks, but it was not always so. When the population was only one-fourteenth of its present density famines were common, and the superabundance of one place could seldom be drawn upon to supplement the deficit of another. In the closing year of Edward the Third, when there was land enough to give every family a large farm almost for the asking, there was widespread misery, and at times actual destitution—so bad was the cultivation of the country, so great the difficulty of storing and removing food to distant places. The most fertile districts could not then have carried a population as dense as that of the wildest mountain regions of Wales in our day.

Does any one ever doubt the regularity of his daily meals? Who ever heard of a dearth of the necessities of life? Were supplies to run short, the telegraph would apprise the whole world of our need, and in a few hours hundreds of vessels would be on their way with abundant supplies; and should our population go on multiplying, as unfortunately it seems likely to do, there is no ground to fear an insufficiency as long as we avoid war with the other great naval Powers. Were we so unfortunate as to find ourselves involved in hostilities with France or America, we might feel the pinch of hunger and be starved into submission; and then we might learn the value of cheap food, and not turn with disgust from those simple and abundant supplies which Nature has provided for us.

Do we, for example, make enough of eggs? The lecture on eggs given a few years ago by Mr. Simmonds before the Society of Arts, deserved careful consideration. Eggs, he thought, were a neglected mine of wealth. They are the one article of agricultural produce for which there is an unlimited demand, and perhaps the only one in which we might defy foreign competition. They not only mean money, but they command prices—so, at least, the lecturer said—that admit of profit compared with which beef and mutton are of secondary importance, and wheat barely worth mentioning. Hens lay eggs which, if not made of gold, are capable of being turned into it, when they can be retailed, all the year round, at little short of a penny apiece, while the eggs of ducks bring still higher prices. Eggs are a perfect meal in themselves; everything necessary to the support of human life being contained in them in the proper proportions and the most palatable form. Plain boiled they are wholesome, although masters of French cookery tell us that it is possible to dress them in more than five hundred different ways, all not only economical, but wholesome. No healthy appetite ever rejected an egg in some guise; it is the most concentrated form of nutriment, and served up in the most pleasant fashion, whole nations rarely touching any other animal food. Kings eat them plain as readily as do their humblest tribesmen. Nay, after the victory of Muhlendorf, when the Kaiser Ludwig sat at meat with his burggrafs and great captains, he determined on a piece of luxury: "one egg to every man, and two to the excellently valiant Schwepperman."

Far more than fish, eggs are the scholar's fare; they contain phosphorus, which is brain food, and sulphur, which discharges many functions in the economy; and they are the best nutriment for children, for they comprise everything necessary to the growth of the youthful frame. Eggs are not food only; they are also medicine. The white is a most useful application to burns, and the oil from the yolk is regarded by the Russians as an almost miraculous salve for cuts, bruises, and scratches. A raw egg, swallowed in time, will detach a fish-bone stuck in the throat, and the white of two renders a dose of corrosive sublimate as harmless as calomel; they strengthen the consumptive, invigorate the feeble, and render the most susceptible almost proof against jaundice in its most malignant forms. They can also be drunk in the shape of that "egg-flip" which sustains the oratorical efforts of the modern statesman. The merits of eggs do not end here. In France wine clarifiers use more than eighty millions a year, and the Alsations make away with fully thirty-eight millions in calico printing and in dressing the leather used in making the finest French kid gloves. Finally, they may almost without trouble be converted into fowls, which are profitable to the seller and welcome to the buyer. Even eggshells are valuable, for allopath and homeopath alike regard them as the purest carbonate of lime.

In spite of these facts, it is humiliating that an article of commerce, to produce which requires hardly any capital, and which is saleable in any quantity, is so little attended to that the supply is in England altogether unequal to the demand. How many eggs are laid in the British Islands can only be roughly conjectured. According to the latest agricultural returns there are, in the United Kingdom, twenty million barndoor fowls, though, as the poultry owned by cottagers were not, except in Ireland, included, the return must be much under the mark, and twenty-five millions might be nearer the number. If we deduct permanent non-layers, in the shape of male birds, and the eleven millions which reach the market as poultry for the table, the remainder represent sitting hens and chicken. Some fowls lay two hundred and twenty eggs a year, others do not give a third of that number. But if each hen is credited with one hundred eggs, there should be at least six hundred millions of eggs from our home fowl-houses. This prodigious number is trifling compared with

the quantity actually required, for if the egg-eaters of the United Kingdom are put at twenty-five millions, it would only admit of each one having twenty-four per annum, and that is far under the mark. Many middle-class families use at breakfast and for cooking a hundred a week, while confectioners, hotels, restaurants, and many other miscellaneous consumers must every day get through four or five times as many, to say nothing of the cratefuls absorbed in many arts and manufactures. In a single photographic establishment two millions are used every year; while the number in calico printing, leather dressing, and, we believe, bookbinding processes must almost exceed the number used as food. How are the wants of Britain supplied? Our eggs are not manufactured, as an ingenious myth some years ago affirmed was the case. The simple explanation is that they are imported. The extent to which they are brought across the sea is shown by the fact that last year we paid three million pounds to foreign farmers for eggs, every pound of which might have remained at home for the British agriculturist's benefit. An annual outlay of three millions of pounds means that the eggs for which this was paid must have come into our ports at the rate of more than three millions and a quarter on every working day. To this branch of the British commissariat France contributes most largely, Germany and Belgium coming next.

Every year these importations are increasing—the number brought from the Continent in 1865 only being a third of that of a year or two ago, and this enormous number does not include the eggs of ducks, geese, and turkeys, or of plovers and other wild birds, for which high prices are invariably given. Calculating one penny as the average price for an egg, although this is a very high estimate much above wholesale prices, a person whose statistics do not seem open to objection reckons the total cost of our egg supply at nearly six million seven hundred thousand pounds. Leaving out the tons of fowls which are imported, it is certain that if our farmers would bestir themselves, not one farthing need go out of the kingdom to purchase eggs, and they might pocket the three millions which the peasant farmers of France, Germany, Belgium, and Holland draw from us. Little capital is required; for great fowl-farms have never paid, unless the hens have a large extent of waste land to roam over. If confined in a narrow

space they are apt, as the proprietor of the town fowl-house knows to his cost, to sicken and die, and in any case their laying falls off. The vast quantities brought from the Continent are collected by travelling higglers from peasant farmers and cottagers, and it is to this class, if the Allotment Act proves workable, that we must look for a diminution of our imports of fowls and eggs. Plenty of farms are at present unlet, which might be utilised for fowl fattening and egg producing. The grain-growing farmer does not care much for flocks of hens, geese, and turkeys; they destroy, he declares, more than they are worth. But in many instances, the soil of some of those English farms which are going out of cultivation is too indifferent to grow wheat or barley, although admirably fitted for poultry rearing and egg producing. Many tracts in the Highlands, good neither for sheep nor game, might be utilised for fowl rearing with some prospect of greater profit than from growing oats. In some parts of Surrey and Sussex, fowl fattening for the London market has recently greatly extended, but little intelligent enterprise is displayed in obtaining the best layers, although the greatest possible differences exist in the size and quality of eggs. A fowl which lays two hundred and twenty eggs per annum is exceptional, but even in Inverness-shire, one hundred and thirty-five to one hundred and fifty per annum are a common return from a single good hen. A score of Irish eggs weigh under two pounds, while the same number of good Dorkings weigh six ounces more. These facts ought to encourage home growers, and teach them the value of careful selection.

While on the subject of agriculture, what a contrast there was between the price of wheat in 1806 and that in 1892! The books of the late Mr. Buckle, who at Michaelmas, 1805, took possession of Barton Farm, in Whippingham Parish, Isle of Wight, teach some curious lessons. Mr. Whitmarsh, the outgoing tenant, summer-fallowed a field of forty acres for wheat, for this he was allowed fifty pounds; this was sown in due season and yielded forty loads of marketable corn, the latter was sold at forty pounds per load! Her Majesty is now the owner of Barton as part of the Osborne Estate; at the beginning of the century it belonged to Lady Isabella Blashford, who appears on the books of 1815. At the date named, a load of wheat would buy a team of good

cart-horses, while swedes were just beginning to be grown by a few of the most enterprising farmers in the Island.

But even in the good old days farming had its drawbacks, as a curious letter which recently appeared in one of the Dorset papers will show. The writer says: "I happened to live sixty years ago at Bryants-puddle, a part of the parish adjoining Tolpuddle, where my father was a farmer. As a child I can well remember our anxiety lest we should be amongst the number of the victims to fire which was threatened to all farmers. The rioters were not men, as at present, wanting to work only eight hours a day, but were for breaking to pieces all machines likely to supersede manual labour on the farm, especially the newly-invented threshing machines. These men were very well satisfied with their very poor wages of eight shillings a week, and were afraid they would be deprived even of these. Arson was at that time a common crime in Dorset, and not long after a youth, named Christopher Wilkins, was hanged at Dorchester for arson at Bridport. People did not much commiserate the rioters."

Closely allied with farming is the game trade. I shall not pretend to discuss the justice or injustice of the game laws; it cannot, however, be denied by any one who has lived in a district abounding in well-stocked preserves, that they provide abundant well-paid employment for gamekeepers and watchers, a ready market to the farmers for a vast amount of produce, and that liberal compensation is generally given to tenants whose crops suffer from the depredations of game. Moreover, land near the coverts lets for much less than other land equally good. "The trade in game is a strange one," wrote Mr. George Dodd, in his "Food of London," a most instructive and, at the time when it was first published in 1856, a most exhaustive work. The foreign game and poultry trade with this country is now positively gigantic. We imported a year or two ago, in splendid condition, one million two hundred thousand fowls, five hundred thousand ptarmigan, two hundred thousand black game, above ten thousand partridges, and over one million wild ducks. The vast bulk of all this comes from Russia, but immense shipments, especially of ducks, come from Norway and Holland, while the Dominion will probably soon send us large quantities.

To contrast these figures with those given by Mr. Dodd thirty-five years ago in the "Food of London" is startling. The

quantities of game then annually sold in Newgate and Leadenhall markets were about one million eight hundred and fifty thousand native and foreign head, and of this total eight hundred and fifty thousand were rabbits. Larks came next, giving an average of one hundred thousand, partridges touched one hundred and fifty thousand, and pheasants only sixty-four thousand; grouse stood at fifty-seven thousand, while snipe went up to one hundred and seven thousand, and ranging between a maximum of forty thousand and a minimum of ten thousand came plovers, woodcock, widgeon, and teal. The hares in those days were a little over one hundred thousand; and Newgate had also the credit of selling forty thousand stone of venison a year. Foreign game was beginning to reach us, while the trade in Ostend rabbits, killed and skinned in Belgium, was rapidly growing. Still more curious cargoes occasionally arrived. Thus, in 1856, a shipment of seventeen thousand quails was made at Civita Vecchia to Liverpool, whence the little strangers were conveyed by rail to London. It must be remembered that large though the consumption of game was when the "Food of London" was written, the trade was, comparatively speaking, in its infancy. Only twenty years before the publication of this remarkable book the sale of game was illegal, and it was only with extreme risk, with the help of many a sly device, that it could reach the markets at all. The grim shadow of William Rufus and the Forest Laws continued to frown on the dinner-tables of the middle classes. Down to the accession of William the Fourth, a heavy property qualification was required for the right to kill game, and fearful penalties were inflicted on unqualified persons for killing game, and for having engines for snaring it, or even for being in the possession of game. The laws against poaching are still stringent enough, but they are not so barbarously tyrannical and inhuman as they were two generations ago. Although by the Act of William the Fourth every person who had taken out a certificate was entitled to shoot game, subject to the law of trespass, which included the prohibition to kill on public roads and highways, it was not until the passing of the Acts Victoria the First and Second, that permission was granted to sell game, the dealers being required to take out an annual license. Up to this time the most extraordinary subterfuges had been resorted to, to evade the law. Nevertheless, in

spite of the penal clauses, there was little difficulty in obtaining a hare or a pheasant for dinner, but when the bill was made out the hare was charged as a "lion" and the pheasant as an "eagle," or something equally ingenious. From this underhand method of game dealing probably arose one of our strangest national peculiarities, but one that most diners-out would be reluctant to change. We are said to be the only civilised nation that invariably, and from preference, eats game "high," and woodcock and venison in an almost putrid condition. The reason for what might otherwise be condemned as a depraved taste among English epicures is, that in the last century the nobility and the squirearchy were often greatly puzzled to know what to do with the game they shot. They could not eat pheasants, partridges, and hares every day; had they done so, satiety, or perhaps blood poisoning, would have resulted. Even fat haunch of venison and venison pasty cloy after a while. They might make presents to their neighbours, but their neighbours were principally noblemen and squires with ample preserves. So the game was smuggled up to London, and "swapped" for fish, and the fishmongers in the course of business sold it to rich merchants and professional families with no preserves of their own. But during its sojourn in the squire's larder, its abode in the lumbering waggon which brought it to the metropolis, and its residence in the fishmonger's cellar, it had usually become exceedingly "high," and the gourmet classes in time became as fond of high game as George the First was of bad oysters. His Majesty could get no others in Hanover, and had to be satisfied with what he could get; and his middle-class subjects were, as regards game, in the same predicament, and when they wanted to eat game, had to be content with it decidedly high. Working-class people are, as a rule, not fonder of game than they are of claret. Our domestic servants will neither eat the one nor drink the other, and their prejudices are shared by the classes from which they are drawn. The poor man and his family, however, delight in rabbits. Bunny boiled, "smothered in onions," roast, baked, hashed, or in a pie, is a viand of which those whose lot it is to labour with their hands never tire; and rabbits are cheap.

Hare is not popular; it will not boil soft; it is a dark, dry, and unattractive meat, which if it be roasted must be lubricated and basted with large quantities of fat

before it eats tenderly, and jugging is far too expensive, difficult, and tedious for the poor man's limited resources. It makes admirable soup, but the poor man's wife remains hopelessly in the dark as to the preparation of any soup except kettle broth, which seems to consist mainly of hot water. It is among the upper classes—the genteel section of society—that those are found who would be affected by a diminution of the game supply. The habitual eating of game has come to be a regular part of the scheme of modern civilisation, which likes snowy napery, bright plate, shining crystal, and pretty flowers on its dinner-table. A little dinner of six is not complete without a dish of game before the sweets and cheese; nay, at much smaller symposia, at dinners, perhaps, at which the only guests are husband and wife, or a couple of friends, the *pièce de résistance* is often a pheasant, a partridge, a grouse, a brace of woodcock, or a wild duck, instead of a joint. Thousands of people with moderate incomes and without any wish to be extravagant, like to live "nicely," and to this very numerous class any diminution in the supply of game would be a serious grievance.

Another dainty, which is getting much dearer, and threatening to become almost too dear for any pockets but the longest and the best filled, is the oyster. Whatever the reason may be, the price has gone steadily up, and now a dozen cost little less than half a hundred did a generation ago. Oysters are a favourite dish, and though so dear and so little satisfying there are still plenty of people who do not hesitate to buy them, though to eat them is almost like eating money. Game is a real food, but the oyster can hardly claim to be more than a condiment or a flavourer; to make it a substantial part of the diet or even of a single meal a day, would mean an outlay that no middle-class family could contemplate without dismay.

Dr. Baster, according to Dr. Johnson, thought the Roman fondness for oysters was a sanitary one. "Living oysters," says Dr. Baster, "are endowed with proper medicinal virtues; they nourish wonderfully and solicit rest; for he who sups on oysters is wont on that night to sleep placidly; and to the valetudinary afflicted with a weak stomach, oppressed with phlegm or bile, eight, ten, or twelve raw oysters in a morning, or one hour before dinner, is more healing than any drug that the apothecary can compound." This

fashion of sharpening the appetite for dinner continues to the present day, and it is not uncommon, in a hospitable house, to be pressed to take a few oysters before dinner; but that an oyster supper promotes sound and refreshing sleep admits of serious doubt, while as for the medicinal value of this tempting mollusc, that too is most improbable.

Fresh oysters are confessedly delicious, but oysters that have been kept some days! Our own George the First, as we have mentioned above, is said to have been inordinately fond of—well—high oysters. His august Majesty could not get fresh oysters at Hanover, so he was fain to be content with what he could get, and it was not the fault of his cooks that when they reached his table the oysters were in such a state that our modern food inspectors would unhesitatingly have condemned them as unfit for human food; but the King did not mind, and had his fill of his favourite mollusc.

To come to something which modern science no longer reckons to be a food—I mean alcohol—a good deal of curious information is to be picked up as to the amount got through in civilised countries. A peculiarity of alcohol certainly is that in all ages and in almost all countries it has found many votaries. In some shape or another alcohol is used by nearly all classes in all parts of the civilised world, and there seems to be no limit to the quantity that can be got through, only given the means to purchase it.

Recent official calculations show that in the United States the consumption of distilled spirits fell from eighty million gallons in 1870 to seventy-six millions in 1888, in spite of an increase of twenty millions in the population, and a still greater proportionate increase in the national wealth; but the consumption of wine rose from twelve million gallons in 1870 to thirty-six millions in 1888; and of malt liquor, from two hundred and five million gallons in 1870 to seven hundred and sixty-seven millions in 1888. From this it would appear that a very remarkable change is going on in the habits of the people, and that whilst the consumption of spirits is decreasing, that of wine and beer is largely on the increase. The greater wealth of the States accounts for the larger consumption of wine, the most costly of all alcoholic beverages in cold countries. In France the consumption of spirits has greatly increased since 1871. In England there was,

for a few years, thanks perhaps in part to Sir Benjamin Richardson, a marked decrease in the outlay on all sorts of intoxicating liquors, but the last few years have again shown an increase. In Germany the use of spirits is stationary, but that of beer has increased, and possibly the larger consumption of beer in the States may be mainly due to the immense number of Germans now settled in America. The difficulty of making any comparison between country and country, and class and class, is due to every nation having intoxicating beverages to which it is addicted, and these differ greatly in their percentage of alcohol. The annual consumption of wine in the whole of Europe is one thousand nine hundred and ninety-one million gallons; of beer and cider, two thousand nine hundred and seventy-five millions; of spirits, three hundred and forty-two millions. This is equal to the consumption of five hundred and twenty-three million gallons of alcohol, or 1·6 gallons per head. The amount consumed in the United States is equivalent to 1·2 gallons; in Canada to 1·0 gallons; and in Australia to 1·2 gallons per head. These figures are curious and suggestive. In explanation of the large consumption of alcohol in France, it might be argued, if we did not know in other ways that there had been an enormous increase in the consumption of intoxicants, that wine is commonly used there at all meals, whereas tea, coffee, and other liquids, are taken in many other countries. The French dram-shops have enormously increased in number, and insanity and intemperance have increased with them, and French writers are recognising the dangers that threaten their fatherland. These facts throw a lurid light on the fallacious reports so generally circulated as to the sobriety of wine-drinking countries, unless we assume, as perhaps we are justified in doing, that in wine-drinking countries total abstinence is almost unheard of, all grown-up people drinking moderately, while in England we have millions of practical abstainers to set against a vast army of intemperate men and women.

The economic aspect is no less important. Mr. Mulhall gives some comparative information, but as he reckons only the cost "in bond," exclusive of the duties which, in England for instance, are very high, and make the national Drink Bill look excessively large, his estimate very much understates the amount actually paid by the consumer, who in the United Kingdom contributes thirty millions a year to the revenue.

The conditions are so diverse in these countries, that any useful comparison is impossible, but we have a significant fact when we compare the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon race. The Briton is said to spend twice as much on alcohol as the American; this may be accurate, though most travellers would fancy, and perhaps correctly, that the latter drinks as freely as the former, and in some districts much more freely. This apparent contradiction may be due to the lower price of stimulants or to systematic evasion of duty in the States.

The yearly drink bills of Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia are reckoned to be as follows, though the figures are probably not mathematically accurate, and can only be the rudest approximations.

For two thousand and seventeen million gallons of wine, one hundred and sixty-seven million pounds; for three thousand six hundred and eighty-four million gallons of beer, cider, and perry, two hundred and forty million pounds; for four hundred and twenty million gallons of spirits, eighty-five million pounds. The cost of intoxicants in these countries may therefore be estimated at the lowest to reach four hundred and ninety-two million pounds!

But even within the United Kingdom there are remarkable differences, as may be seen by comparing the figures of 1885, when the consumption of beer in England was thirty-two gallons per head, in Scotland sixteen, and in Ireland sixteen; the consumption of cider in England 0.4, and none at all in the other two countries; the consumption of spirits in England 0.8, in Scotland 1.9, in Ireland 1; the consumption of wine 0.5 in England, 0.5 in Scotland, and 0.2 in Ireland. The English drinker's partiality for beer and the Scotch and the Irish drinker's preference for spirits is clearly shown. When these amounts are converted into their equivalents of alcohol, we see that Ireland consumes least—1.4 gallons per head, Scotland comes next with 1.6, and England heads the list with 2.13 gallons of alcohol for each man, woman, and child of the population; this, by a curious and undesigned coincidence, is just under one ounce a day per head, the quantity which so many medical authorities assume can be safely taken—the physiological quantity of which the country has heard so much of late years. Children seldom touch alcohol, most women take little, and many men do not take any at

all; so that the habitual consumers of alcohol, whether they drink to excess or not, get through three or four times the amount which the leading medical authorities assert should not be exceeded.

EBB AND FLOW.

Up at your grave, my darling, where the great tides ebb and flow,
Where the tall cross faces the wild west wind, and the early snowdrops blow.
Up at your grave, my darling, the steps grow weak and slow,
The dim eyes scarcely see the waves where the great tides ebb and flow.
The ears are dull to the music where the great tides ebb and flow,
The crash of the rollers lacks the spell they wove me long ago.
So many hopes have failed me, so many dreams lie low,
Since I left your rest upon the Head where the great tides ebb and flow.
Yet one thing never alters, as the great tides ebb and flow,
As I loved you then, I love you now, and in Heaven, my dear, you know.

MR. DUDDLE'S TEMPTATION.

A COMPLETE STORY.

"PLEASE, sir," said my clerk, "there's a man wants to see you."

"Is there, Toby?" said I, rousing myself somewhat unwillingly from a day-dream of many clients. "What sort of a man?"

"Well, sir," replied Toby, looking rather puzzled, "he's—well, he's what they call in the police reports 'respectably dressed.' Wears a blue ribbon in his buttonhole, and looks as if he had a little bit of 'ouse property. Name of Dudley I think he said, sir."

As Toby is deaf enough to make his habit of listening at the door of my private office a mere harmless eccentricity, I was not surprised to find that the respectably-dressed man's name was not Dudley, but Duddel.

"I was recommended to you, sir," he began, "by the Vicar of the parish. I'm a Nonconformist myself, but when I want advice on worldly matters I go to the clergy of the Church of England as by law established."

"Indeed!" said I. "May I ask why?"

"Well," he explained, "they're in a way, you know, guaranteed by Government, and our ministers ain't. There's the same difference exactly as there is between house property or companies' shares and Government Stock."

"I think I follow you," said I, though

to tell the truth I was somewhat bewildered by this strange analogy. "And now, what can I do for you?"

"Well," said he, "I've got a bit of property, and I want to have it guaranteed by Government the same as is the respectability of the Church of England. That is, I want to sell all that I have and give to—I beg pardon, sir. Since I came into money my mind keeps running on that text, though I never could persuade myself it was meant for these times. I should have said, and buy Consols."

Now as a solicitor I naturally favour mortgages as investments, especially when I see a chance of drawing up the deeds myself.

"I am afraid you would sacrifice a considerable proportion of your income by taking such a course, Mr. Duddel," said I. "Now, if——"

"Oh, I don't mind that, sir," he interrupted. "I calculate my bit of property ought to fetch forty thousand pounds, there or thereabouts, and that, even at two per cent., brings in eight hundred a year according to the ready reckoner. Considering that me and the missis have rubbed along on about thirty shillings a week for the last twenty years, we ought to find that enough, don't you think?"

Forty thousand pounds! Here was a client indeed! Did my prospective father-in-law, the Reverend Anthony Simpson, I wondered, know what a remarkably successful fly he had advised to walk into my parlour?

"Ah!" said I, doing my best not to let my tone betray my pleasure at the prospect before me. "I see. You want, above all things, to be free from care and business worry. To put yourself in a position to say, 'I spend my dividends; my banker does the rest.'"

"Just so, sir," replied Mr. Duddel.

Just so. Since the building society, to which I trusted my savings, came to grief, I put no faith in bricks and mortar; and when this money came to me through the death of a half-brother I'd not seen or even heard of since I was a boy, I says to my wife, 'Government security or nothing, this time, Jane'; and Jane being quite agreeable, as soon as we'd settled here—Sawbury, sir, is my wife's native place—I called on the Reverend Simpson, and he advised me to come to you."

"Then how, Mr. Duddel," I asked, "is your property at present disposed?"

The bulk of it, it appeared, consisted of

little houses in the poorer parts of London—a few in Bethnal Green, half-a-dozen in Camberwell, one or two in Hackney, and so on—but there was a good deal of personalty as well, all of which was invested in excellent securities which there was no earthly reason for selling. On the whole it seemed a most desirable property, and I felt that any little difficulties which the management of it presented could easily and profitably be smoothed away by a smart young solicitor with plenty of time to place at the owner's disposal.

I hinted as much to Mr. Duddel, but it was no good. He would allow me, within reasonable limits, plenty of time to dispose of it to the best advantage, but disposed of it must be—"every brick and every share," he emphatically declared—and the proceeds invested in whatever description of Government Stock gave the best return for the money. This, of course, settled the question, and, after arranging a few preliminary details and fixing a time for our next interview, we parted.

"Toby," said I, as soon as Mr. Duddel had gone, "run down to Lowe's and tell them to paint 'John Duddel, Esquire,' on the largest deed-box they have in stock, and send it up as soon as they can."

"Oh, crikey!" cried Toby, pointing with thumb over shoulder towards the street. "All that for him? Well, he don't look worth it, do 'e? But there, you never can tell by their togs how they stand at the bank."

Though I felt it my duty to rebuke Toby, I could not conscientiously deny that the personal appearance of my new client bore witness to the truth of his aphorism. Mr. Duddel certainly was dressed more in accordance with his former station in life—he had been a cheesemonger's shopman—than with his present one. He also bore himself much more humbly towards the universe at large than did the other half-dozen gentlemen of independent means who tolerated Sawbury as a place of residence; nor had he acquired that art of looking at things in general with an I-could-buy-that-if-I-liked-but-it-really-isn't-worth-it expression which goes so far to distinguish these rich men from their impecunious fellow-citizens.

Consequently Mr. Duddel, though he soon became popular in Sawbury, was never so much respected as he might have been had he been able or willing to acquire a mysterious something which Toby called "side."

"He's as nice a gentleman, sir," said Toby—nice and liberal, are, I fear, convertible terms in Toby's vocabulary—"as ever stepped into this office. Ain't it a pity he don't get more swagger on him?"

Now I liked Mr. Duddel so well as he was that I should have been sorry to see any change in him; but Mrs. Duddel, whose acquaintance I soon made, was quite of Toby's opinion, though she expressed herself differently.

"I do wish Duddel would drop that tread-on-me-I-rather-like-it way he has," said she, with a sigh. "It was all very well, perhaps, when he had a master to please, and a situation to keep, but now he could buy up half the tradesmen in Sawbury, it does vex me to see him go into a shop looking that meek, I wonder they serve him. Why, the very minister at the chapel, though Duddel's promised to guarantee him a fifty-pound rise in salary, puts upon him; and as for his wife—but I'll soon show that young woman her place, depend upon it."

Unfortunately the proper way of conducting oneself under a sudden rise in the world was not the only point on which Mr. and Mrs. Duddel differed. He was a strict teetotaler; she had a weakness for bottled stout. He objected to public entertainments of any kind, but particularly to dramatic entertainments; she patronised every touring company that visited the town. He was staunch to his chapel; she, after the failure of her attempt to reduce the minister's wife to subjection, persisted in going to church. He delighted in acting as a sort of amateur relieving officer; she wanted to set up a carriage and pair. Her costumes were as gaudy and as unsuitable to a stout, red-faced woman of five-and-forty, as his dress was plain; and her temper was as trying as his was placid. I cannot say they quarrelled. It proverbially takes two to make anything worth calling a fight, and Mr. Duddel persistently refused, even under the most extreme provocation, to fall to with any spirit. He did not, however, pretend that he lived happily with his wife.

"I can't make it out, though, Maitland," said he one day, about a year after his first call. "When we lived in one room there was hardly ever a cross word between us, unless maybe Jane was tired with the washing or something, and now, when we've got a house that big I almost lose myself in it at times, we're wrangling and jangling from morning till night. It's my

fault more than hers, I dare say, though the money does seem to have changed her. Before it came she never touched liquor, and as for play-acting, she no more thought of wasting her time at it than I did. If it wasn't that I daren't desert my post as steward of it, I'd hand over my money to some charity and go back to the old life. I would indeed."

I have often found that rich men who ostentatiously profess to be merely "stewards" of their wealth are most abominably unjust ones, but Mr. Duddel was an exception to the rule. He was, I am certain, sincere in his frequently expressed belief that he simply held his money in trust for the benefit of the poor, and no one could deny that he acted up to his professions.

Even his wife, who paid me an unexpected visit at my office only a few days after he had thus bewailed his lot, bore testimony to his lavish, if not always judicious, generosity.

"Give!" said she.—She wanted, it appeared, a few pounds for her private use, and I had suggested that she had better ask her husband for them.—"Yes. Duddel would give the coat off his back to the first dirty tramp who had impudence enough to ask for it, but his lawful wife's another matter altogether. I declare to you, Mr. Maitland, I had more money to do what I liked with in the old days than I have now. Why, nowadays, even my poor drop of stout goes down in the grocer's bill, and Duddel groans and turns up the whites of his eyes over paying for it as if it was so much liquid gold. As I tell him, many a woman in my position would touch nothing more common than champagne, or leastways port and sherry wine."

"But, my dear madam," said I, "I'm afraid you mistake Mr. Duddel's motives. His objections to paying for intoxicating liquor are based on conscientious rather than economical grounds. He would not, I am sure, grudge you anything in reason."

"Look here, Mr. Maitland," she went on. "Do you call a quarten of gin or a pint of four ale after a woman's done a day's washing, reason? Not being a bigoted, pig-headed blue-ribbonite, of course you do. Well, Duddel didn't. It used to be his boast that not a drop of liquor, malt or spirituous, ever came inside our door. Much he knew about it! When a man's away at work from seven in the morning till nine at night, and even later on Saturdays, his wife has a chance to manage her own affairs in her own way. But now he's

at home every day and all day. He doesn't hand me over his dividends to keep house on, the same as he did his wages, but tells me to order what I want, and he'll draw cheques. Now you're not a married man yet, but I hear you're soon going to be, so I give you this piece of advice. If you want your wife to make you happy, don't you be too inquisitive about things that don't concern you. Duddel always was, even in the old days, and therefore I made a fool of him for his own good; but now I can't, and the consequence is we live like cat and dog. Why, in those times, if I wanted to go to a theatre, I just slipped out on a Saturday night, paid my shilling to the gallery, and was home again long before Duddel was back from the shop; but now, if ever there does happen to be a chance of an evening's amusement, I have to book a reserved seat at Lowe's, and put up with a preachment about money having given me a hankering after unlawful pleasures, when the bill comes in."

This artless revelation—I fear Mrs. Duddel had had more than one bottle of stout that afternoon—cast a new and somewhat lurid light on the fool's paradise in which Mr. Duddel had dwelt so long; but, though it was, therefore, interesting, I failed to understand why I had been privileged to listen to it.

"You'll soon see, if you're half as sharp as I take you to be," said Mrs. Duddel, when I hinted as much. "I've told you all this because I want you to put me in a position to carry on the same old game, as the song says. You do a lot of lawyer's work for Duddel, and charge him plenty for it, I'm sure. Can't you charge him a bit more and let me have the difference? If you will, I'll take care he doesn't change his solicitor; and if you won't—well, I persuaded him to come to Sawbury, and I don't doubt but what I could manage to make him leave. Anyhow, I'll try."

"My dear madam," I exclaimed, "don't you know that if I did as you suggest we should both be guilty of a criminal conspiracy?"

"I don't care what I am guilty of, so long as I get a little pocket-money," returned the lady, unabashed. "And as for you—well, being a lawyer, you're used to conspiracies, I dare say."

"But," said I, ignoring this slur on my professional rectitude, "you are quite mistaken in supposing that I have done much work for Mr. Duddel lately. Now all his money is in Consols, there is very

little to do. Most of his visits to me are of an altogether friendly nature, and, as his friend, I fear it will be my duty to inform him of the very strange proposal you have just made."

"Oh! you can tell him if you like," replied the undaunted virago. "I don't care. All I know is, I'm not going to stand this sort of life any longer. I'll have a separation first."

"A separation! The very thing!" thought I, as, after Mrs. Duddel had gone, I sat musing awhile over the peep at the seamy side of married life she had afforded me.

I felt very sorry for Duddel. He was such a simple, inoffensive, well-meaning old fellow that no one could help liking him, but his wife was already the talk of the town. Every gossip in the place knew to a bottle how much stout she drank, and to a word what she said to her husband whenever she exceeded her usual allowance. The few decent people who had at first tried to tolerate her for her husband's sake had given her up in despair, and her present acquaintances were more likely to encourage than to restrain her excesses. If she wished for a separation, Duddel, I thought, could have no possible reason for objecting to one; and the next time he poured his tale of domestic woe into my sympathetic ear, I suggested that, as he and Mrs. Duddel couldn't live peaceably together, it might be advisable to part.

"Part!" he repeated. "But, man, we're man and wife."

"Of course," said I, smiling, but as imperceptibly as possible, at his simplicity, "but you can easily afford the luxury of separate domiciles. When both are willing to do otherwise, man and wife are not bound to live under one roof."

"No," said he thoughtfully. "I suppose not. But we'd have to go before a magistrate, wouldn't we?"

"Not necessarily," I replied. "You could come to a mutual agreement, and I should draw up a deed. Of course you would have to make Mrs. Duddel a suitable allowance."

"I'd do that," he cried eagerly. "Or she could have half my Consols transferred to her name. But you must give me time to think it over."

Unfortunately for me, Mr. Duddel did not content himself with thinking over my proposal, but called at my office every day and sometimes twice a day to talk about it. As far as inclination went, he had, he

candidly confessed, no objection whatever to live apart from his wife for the rest of his days, but inclination did not go a great way with Mr. Duddel. It was thwarted at every turn by conscientious scruples, and, as far as I could read his mind, he seemed to hope I might have some arguments to advance which would remove those scruples. I did my best not to disappoint him. At interview after interview I marched whole armies of my most specious arguments against his position, but, logically indefensible though I proved it, not a scruple stirred.

Now there is something about the unreasonable uprightness of firmly-fixed conscientious scruples which irritates me, and at last I lost patience with Mr. Duddel's. If I had not been out of temper, I don't suppose I should ever have told him how utterly deluded he was in supposing that Mrs. Duddel's taste for liquor and the drama was newly acquired.

"You don't mean that?" he gasped, when I had undeceived him.

"I do," said I. "But don't take my word for it. Ask your wife herself."

"I will," said he, with a sigh. "Not that I doubt your word, but surely, surely she can't have tricked me all these years. I'd sooner believe she lied to you, Maitland."

That Mrs. Duddel would lie to me or anybody else if she had anything to gain by it I had not the least doubt; but, as I did not see what motive she could have had for doing so in this instance, I said I thought she had for once in a way spoken the truth.

"I hope not," said Mr. Duddel despondently. "It sounds a queer thing to say, but I hope not."

"Well," I replied, "I don't want to hurt your feelings, but for your sake I hope Mrs. Duddel sticks to her story."

"Why?" he asked. "Surely it's bad enough to know she's what she is now. It would kill me, I think, if I found she'd never been what I thought her."

"Not it, man," said I. "But I should think it would convince you that you are justified in letting her go her own way."

"Ay! But where would that take her?" persisted Mr. Duddel.

"Back to London, I dare say," I replied. "But what would that matter to you? We should, of course, insert in the deed the usual clause making her allowance

dependent on her leaving you free from molestation."

"Ah! I meant where would she go in a spiritual sense?" explained Mr. Duddel. "Though, after all, to a woman with money and time on her hands and no principles to guide her, London and the devil is much the same thing. However, after what you've told me, I can't decide now. I'll have a talk with poor Jane, and call again to-morrow if you don't mind."

But poor Mr. Duddel never called again. On his way home he was run over by a brewer's dray, and he succumbed to his injuries before I even heard of the accident.

"He was very anxious to see you," said the doctor who attended him. "And when we told him you had gone out of town, he gave me a message for you. I was to tell you it had been a terribly strong temptation, but that he'd prayed hard to be delivered from it, and that he died happy because he felt sure that dray was his answer. It sounds rather delirious, but I promised the poor fellow I would give you his exact words. Perhaps you can twist a meaning out of them."

Their meaning, of course, was perfectly clear to me, and, though I still think poor Duddel would have been justified in living apart from his wife—she reformed for a while after his death, but has lately relapsed, and talks of marrying a reprobate young enough to be her son—I will never again subject any client of mine to a similar temptation.

ROUND ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD.

"'PAUL'S Churchyard, sir! Low archway on the carriage side." The archway is here, and it is all that is left of the Doctors' Commons that Sam Weller described. It is here to-day, this bright November morning, when the streets of the City are still showing signs of yesterday's Lord Mayor's show. But it may be gone to-morrow, even though the intention be to spare it in the great demolition now going on; for although propped up and protected by huge beams, it has a rather cranky appearance. Anyhow, to-day is ours, and we may pass under the low-browed arch into the vacancy beyond—a deep, cavernous void from which rise scaffoldings immensely tall, and platforms occupied by huge derricks and engines of various kinds, and a kind of exhalation,

composed of wafts of steam and the dust of falling buildings. And with these sights are associated all manner of strange sounds—voices from the depths, voices from the heights where the dizzy scaffolds seem to mingle with the pinnacles of Paul's, the throb of engines, the clanking of chains, the clink of trowels, and the thunder of falling materials.

Above the whole scene rise in the soft sunshine the great dome of the Cathedral, its attendant towers and pinnacles, and all the framework of the huge building, from the softly shining gilded cross among the clouds, to its base among the clods of buried generations; the upper part washed by rain-storms and bleached with sunshine, while the lower stage is as black and dingy as can be. But the whole to be seen in one marvellous coup-d'œil just for once in a lifetime; for when shall we have such a big gap again in the chevaux-de-frise that is called St. Paul's Churchyard?

A glance into the big hole, which might send a quiver through the ghost of great Sir Christopher, so closely does it approach the foundations of his mighty temple, shows at a glance a history of unnumbered centuries written in rubbish and drift. There are about twenty to thirty feet of finely pulverised London dust and rubbish, that run away like a stream down the gaping ravines of rubble beneath. And that represents the life of some twenty centuries—its buildings, its arts, its crafts, the very dust of its dead. Sir Christopher tells us how the workmen digging out the foundations of his new St. Paul's, came first upon "Saxon" graves neatly lined with chalk stones, and then deeper still to British graves, and intermixed with these, and even lower, were Roman funeral urns. But hereabouts the ground has been too frequently pulverised and disturbed to yield any valuable relics. It is just the dust and rubbish of centuries—nothing more. A black streak may represent Boadicea's fiery vengeance; a patch of ashes, the rise and fall of a new Rome. And it is all shovelled into huge cauldrons, swung away on a big derrick, and tipped into a bespattered cart that presently goes rumbling away down Carter Lane.

There is river gravel, too, great layers of it, left there by a mightier Thames than ours, and below the workmen seem to have come across a substantial clayey floor; and presently the great hole will be filled with stone and concrete, and

a huge warehouse will arise with upper windows that may look over the roof of St. Paul's.

The procession of carts down Carter Lane, loaded with the rubbish of old London, calls to mind the origin of the lane according to old Stowe. For when the Norman Bishops enclosed the precinct with a high wall, so that carts could no longer pass that way, the carters made a way for themselves just outside the wall, which soon took the name of Carter Lane. And the carters of to-day probably don't differ widely from those of mediæval times.

In a quiet corner apart from all this bustle is the old-fashioned "Deanery," that will soon be almost buried among tall warehouses; and there are still offices of an ecclesiastical character round about, and notices as to marriage licenses are posted here and there, although the touting porters in their white aprons no longer inveigle unsuspecting widowers to their doom. But the vicar-general of Canterbury has taken wing from this scene of confusion, and has settled not far off in Creed Lane, among photographers, special tea shops, and a crowd of miscellaneous traders.

Passing along the lane eastwards—where waggons are backing in upon wooden platforms, fixed on the verge of the great abyss, and cranes are hauling forth their loads of ballast, while on the other side houses, all shuttered up, await their impending doom—we reach a less agitated region at Godliman Street, which is still within the ancient precinct of St. Paul's. Here were the capitular bakehouse and brewhouse, the former still commemorated in the name of a small court upon its site. And following Godliman Street, the name of which is no testimony to the piety of the Churchmen, as might be supposed, we come upon the crowded Churchyard at the point where Cannon Street and venerable Watling Street debouch upon it. Watling Street was there before Church or Canons either—a link in the great highway of early Britain—and there is a note of antiquity, too, about Old Change, where merchants congregated what time the busy world was airing itself on the flags of Paul's Walk.

There are merchants still in Old Change. They stand at the doors of their warehouses, florid and benevolent-looking. It is Saturday morning, and there is the comfortable feeling among them that it will soon be time to shut up shop. "Can you

match this, old man?" cries one who arrives hatless and breathless from an adjoining warehouse, flourishing a morsel of silk or satin pinned to a slip of paper. Bald heads and big watch-chains congregate about the morsel of silk; it is plucked at and crumpled up. Finally the dictum is pronounced, "I think Jones can do it," and the bareheaded one departs in search of Jones.

And then before we know where we are, here is Cheapside with its crowds, just by Robert Peel's statue, which looks complacently down upon the whirling streams of traffic; and successfully negotiating the crossing we attain the more tranquil purlieus of Paternoster Row. Now the Row also marks the direction of the ancient enclosure, but must have been within the wall of the precincts, and probably to begin with a row of booths, where people sold rosaries, and crucifixes, and badges or charms of various kinds, to the numerous pilgrims that flocked to the different shrines. The booksellers came afterwards, and almost in a body, from Little Britain by Bartholomew's—1720—although there were probably always sellers of religious books, and sermons, when these came into fashion, among the text-writers, the spurriers, and the lace-dealers who were there in Stowe's time and earlier. And the publishers of religious books seem to be coming to the front again in the Row, for many of the secular publishers have migrated westwards, and it even seems as if other trades were pushing their way into the booksellers' sanctuary.

If there is nothing strikingly picturesque about Paternoster Row, there are alleys and passages which open out hither and thither in a way quite unexpected and delightful. There is Cannon Alley where the Minor Canons had their dwelling of old, and which issues unexpectedly just opposite the great north door of "Pawles." Just eastward of this was Paul's Cross, where Court and City met to listen to some famous preacher, and close by was the tocsin that summoned the citizens to arms. Another alley is lined with book-shelves and second-hand books; and again another leads beneath a low-browed archway, with the glimpse of a street beyond altogether like a glimpse into another age and an earlier city. There is sunshine on the gables of the houses, that gently incline towards each other across the way; while fruit and vegetables make a sort of glow of their own in the homely, open shop-

fronts, and a few passers-by are strolling along in a quiet, leisurely way.

Another kind of city opens out from another alley; there is a smell of fustians in the air, and a broad Yorkshire accent in the directions shouted to a carman who is trundling along a bale of goods. What are Dewsbury Kidders and Dutches? Have they anything to do with kippers or cheeses? No, with rolls of carpets apparently; and now we are in Kidderminster itself, which is Brussels in another form, and Bradford looms in the horizon, and Manchester perhaps is not far off. No omnibuses come this way—only heavy lorries, and iron-bound railway carts. And everything is very quiet and still till a hansom dashes up, lurching over the cobble-stones, and Bradford rushes out, watch in hand, determined to catch the midday train for his native vale. For it is Saturday morning, remember, and people look as if they would rather miss a good order than their homeward trains.

But we are travelling too far afield, and another passage brings us back to Paternoster Square, full of all kinds of trades, and with archways that lead into other squares, through alleys and courts all quiet and silent just now; and without knowing exactly how, here we are in the paved enclosure of Stationers' Hall, with its copyright door, where young authors sometimes plank down their half-crowns in the robust faith of getting a return for their money. And that plane-tree is still flourishing; seems to grow taller every year as if in a hopeless endeavour to see over the tops of the buildings that are being piled up round about.

Again, trusting to unknown passages, behold we are at Amen Corner, where still seems to linger the echo of a faint Amen, busy as it is just now with carts and parcels of books. But what stillness there is in Amen Court, which you enter by a great wooden gateway, with a lamp over it that must have known oil in its earlier days! A quaint row of houses with iron rails and extinguishers for the links that may not be out of date when there is a dense fog in the City, shows the residences of the Minor Canons, and there is the Cathedral Close beyond, a pleasant sort of desert bordered by a few leafless trees and shrubs, where some children are at play.

London House Yard, again, may have been the courtyard of the old Bishop's palace, and it still contains that old tavern,

the "Goose and Gridiron," to which Sir Christopher Wren resorted while St. Paul's was building, and where was held the Masonic lodge of which he was a zealous member. The sign, too, is said to be a caricature presentment of the arms of the Company of Musicians which met there at a still earlier date—"the swan that is in a double tressure," whatever that may be. In latter days there was a shilling ordinary there at one o'clock, just keeping up the traditional ordinary of St. Paul's to our own times. Tarleton, you may remember, had one in Paternoster Row, to which probably Shakespeare himself sometimes resorted. But the goose has sung its dying note, and the gridiron may be hung in the willow-tree, for the house is closed now, and probably will soon come down altogether.

Nor is there any more a Chapter coffee house, where Chatterton met all the geniuses of the day, where Goldsmith lingered and squabbled, and where Charlotte Brontë put up when she came to see her publisher in the golden days of "Jane Eyre."

And now, as we come round to the front of Paul's again to watch the busy scene of demolition which first attracted us, hark! noon is tolled out by the big clock overhead. Forthwith from the big hole clangs forth another bell, and suddenly all labour ceases. Hammers and trowels are dropped, and from the high scaffoldings tiny figures glide down to join the world below. Others are gathering up their tools and donning their outer coats, while steam is blowing off in the big cranes, and the derrick shoots its last load of buried London into the bespattered cart. The week's work is done, and nobody looks sorry. There is movement now about the shops and warehouses; a general putting up of shutters at the big establishments. Young women issue forth in groups—head saleswoman moving off arm in arm with chief milliner. For a while everybody seems to be in the streets; you might walk on people's heads in St. Paul's Churchyard and along Cheapside. Omnibuses well packed are waiting in long lines for the policeman's permissive signal, and while those are only comfortably full, trains are packed to repletion, and heavy baskets of tools, bags of angle irons and such-like trifles are rattled against the ankles of helpless passengers. It is a joyous, irresistible flight from the City, which we are bound to share.

RICHENDA.

By MARGARET MOULE.

Author of "*The Thirteenth Brydain*," "*Catherine Maidment's Burden*," "*Benefit of Clergy*," "*The Vicar's Aunt*," etc. etc.

CHAPTER I.

It was hotter on top of the omnibus than it was inside. So, at least, thought the girl who was sitting on one of the garden seats near the back. On her left hand side was a large, heavy man, whose presence added to the heat of the May morning for her, as he encroached considerably on her share of the seat, and his shoulder interfered with the little worn sunshade which she tried perseveringly to hold between her and the sun. At length she put it down, with a little gesture of impatience. The omnibus was slowly rolling eastward along the hottest part of the Bayswater Road, towards the Marble Arch, and the sun's rays beat down on the now unprotected little figure with all their force. It was a pretty little figure, slight and well formed; and, as far as it was possible to judge while she was sitting in that cramped position in her corner, the girl was rather short. She was wearing a mauve cotton blouse and a black skirt; every detail of these, as of her gloves and her black coarse straw hat, was very precise and dainty. The black straw hat crowned a quantity of soft brown hair. There was a good deal of red in the brown, and the sun's rays had caught every red thread, and so lighted it that it looked golden. It was very wavy, curly hair. It was beautifully kept, and evidently the greatest pains had been taken to bring both waves and curls into subjection. They were neatly and tightly pinned down, and the whole was fastened up into a compact mass at the back of her pretty head. The brow over which the brown hair curled was broad and white. No lines had marked its almost childish smoothness. The face was of an oval shape, and its features were all delicately cut. The eyes were a lovely dark blue, shaded with dark lashes, and dark, delicately drawn eyebrows—the sort of eyes which, to use the Irish phrase, had been put in with "the least touch of a smutty finger." The mouth promised to be strong; but the whole face was still so young that it was difficult to say what expression time might, or might not, set upon it. Both the blue eyes and the mouth, how-

ever, at present were decidedly anxious. The pallor too, that overspread the pretty face, evidently was not due to the heat of the sun, but owed its origin to the same feeling.

She had been sitting for some time with her eyes on her closed sunshade. She raised them suddenly and looked up as if to see how far she had come. Then she took from the pocket of the black skirt a letter. It was directed to Miss R. Leicester, eighteen, Morville Square, W. She opened it and took out a short note; a note that only occupied half the first side of the sheet. She read it through, and the anxiety deepened. She glanced hurriedly at a plain little silver watch which was tucked into the front of her dress; restoring it to its place, she looked at the driver as if she longed to urge him to go faster, and finally settled herself again with her eyes firmly fixed on the gleaming white of the Marble Arch. In a few minutes more the omnibus had reached the Marble Arch and stopped. The girl gathered the sunshade and the letter up in one hand, rose, squeezed herself gently past the stolid large man, and got down. The conductor handed her on to the pavement with perhaps unnecessary care, and the omnibus rolled off, leaving her looking about her with a shade of perplexity mingled with the anxiety in her eyes.

"Twelve, Bryanston Street," she said to herself, in a pretty low voice. "I wonder which is the quickest way to it?"

She stood and considered for a moment; then she seemed to make up her mind; and turned and walked with quick, decided steps to her left. Five minutes' brisk walk brought her to Bryanston Street, and two minutes more to the door of number twelve. She went up two white steps determinedly enough, and rang the bell with a firm hand. Then her courage seemed to fail her a little, the anxiety in the blue eyes grew almost painful, and her breath came quick and fast.

"I wish it was over," she said.

She had just straightened her skirt with a nervous touch, when the door was opened by a smart parlourmaid, who stared at her from head to foot with a scrutinising, supercilious stare. A little flush came over the girl's cheeks, but her manner was quite dignified and steady, and her voice very composed as she said quietly:

"Is Mrs. Fitzgerald in? Can she see me?"

"Yes, she is in," said the parlourmaid, with a little jerk of her head that seemed to imply a decided contempt for the asker of the question. "What name shall I say?"

"Miss Leicester, please," was the answer.

The parlourmaid turned sharply round, muttering something to herself, and sailed away, leaving the pretty little figure standing lonely in the middle of the tiled entrance hall. She had not gone many steps, however, before a thought seemed to strike her.

"Come this way, please," she said over her shoulder.

Miss Leicester obeyed, and the parlourmaid led the way into a little back room, furnished with what were evidently cast off remnants from larger rooms. She shut the door and went away without a word. Miss Leicester sat down on a large, uncomfortable mahogany chair, and began to look about her.

"Oh, dear," she said with a heavy sigh. "Will all the servants be like that always, I wonder?" Then with an odd little change of tone, which made her voice sound almost as if she were speaking to another person: "Don't be so foolish, Richenda," she said. "There's no drawing back from it now; and besides, you know you haven't the smallest intention of drawing back!" And she fixed her eyes resolutely on a dim old engraving that hung opposite to her.

She was still studying it fixedly when the door opened. It was opened with a good deal of unnecessary clatter, and in some indescribable way the echoes of the clatter seemed to precede into the little room the person who was entering. This was a woman of five or six-and-thirty, not tall, or large, but rather substantially and solidly built. She was wearing a crepon gown made in exaggeration of the prevailing fashion; and her hair was dyed and dressed to correspond. Her face had evidently been pretty once; its lines were growing heavy now, but might have had a good deal of attractiveness still, if it had not been for the evident traces of the "make up" she used. On her hands, which, though white, were ill-shaped, a quantity of diamond rings sparkled as she feebly waved the large fan she held. She fixed a rather small pair of brilliant black eyes on Miss Leicester.

"You've come about the nurse's situation, I suppose?" she said.

Miss Leicester coloured.

"I had your letter to say you would see me at twelve o'clock to-day," she said diffidently.

"Oh, certainly, certainly!" was the answer. "Oh, certainly, certainly!"

Mrs. Fitzgerald's voice was not by nature musical, and education had evidently had very little chance of improving it. It was high pitched and harsh.

"Oh, yes, I told you to come at twelve, I know. It's quite right. Sit down, pray."

Miss Leicester had risen when Mrs. Fitzgerald came into the room, and was still standing. She sat down now quietly, and Mrs. Fitzgerald sank heavily and ungracefully into the chair opposite to her.

"They gave me an excellent account of you at the Training Institution," she said. "So I thought I would send for you and see for myself if you were likely to suit. How old are you?"

Mrs. Fitzgerald fanned herself vigorously as she waited for the answer to the question.

"Twenty," responded Miss Leicester.

"Twenty!" was the reflective answer. "It's scarcely old enough to manage children, I should have thought. What experience have you had?"

"Only my training," was the quiet answer.

"Only your training? I don't know that that counts for much; I don't think much of those Institutions—modern fancies, I call them. But another young woman from the same place has been so well-spoken of to me that I thought I'd try one. I don't know that I wasn't rather foolish, after all."

All this was said with so fixed a stare at Miss Leicester as to make the colour rush over her face in a great wave of crimson. Mrs. Fitzgerald regarded her angrily.

"I hope you have no affectations of that sort?" she said severely, "or you certainly won't do for me. Blushing when you are looked at is ridiculous nonsense. Do you know your duties?"

"I suppose they are all comprised in the care of the children?" Miss Leicester said.

"Yes, and you will have their clothes to make and mend. I suppose you are a good needlewoman? You would have, of course, to wash and dress them, and be with them all day long, until they go to bed at night. You would have your meals in the nursery, and you would have no cleaning to do; the nursemaid does all that. I don't give any holidays, except

one afternoon a month. Indeed, I didn't allow the last servant more than one in two months; but your matron, or whatever she is at the Training Institution, made absurd stipulations about it, so I suppose you would have to have it, though I consider it most ridiculous. The wages you ask are twenty-five pounds, I think?"

"Twenty-five pounds," repeated Miss Leicester.

Something in that pretty voice, or in the face of the girl sitting opposite to her, seemed rather to irritate Mrs. Fitzgerald. Her voice grew harder and sharper with each sentence.

"I think that is all," she said. "Oh, there is one more thing. I hope you are not engaged, or won't get engaged while you are in my service? I can't and won't have any young men followers."

Miss Leicester's little mouth set itself into rather haughty lines.

"I am neither engaged, nor about to become so," she said coldly.

"That's all right! What is your Christian name? Not that I should call you by it—I should call you Leicester."

"Richenda."

"Richenda? What a frightful out of the world sort of name!"

"It is a family name," was the answer, very quietly spoken.

"Oh, indeed? I think they said at the Institution that you had no relations?"

"I have three brothers."

"Well, I can't have them about the house to see you if you come here."

"They are all at school."

"Oh! And I suppose you thought it your duty to help keep them there, eh?"

"I wish to earn my living," was the rather proudly spoken reply.

Mrs. Fitzgerald rose and took one more comprehensive look at Miss Leicester. It was the sort of look that only a woman knows how to give, a look that included every detail in her dress at once, and expressed contempt for them all.

Miss Leicester, of course, had risen also.

"You understand that you cannot dress to please yourself while you are in my service?" Mrs. Fitzgerald said. "I require the nurse to wear white all day. You will be allowed two washing dresses a week. I have made up my mind to engage you and see how it answers. I shall expect you on the twentieth. Mind you are here in good time. The other servant leaves in the morning. Good morning."

Mrs. Fitzgerald went out of the little

room with as much noise as she had entered it, and a moment or two later Miss Leicester rather hesitatingly opened the door and followed her. She looked about her for some sign of the smart parlour-maid, but there was none. The only course open to her was to let herself out. This she did, shutting the door behind her with a sigh that was smothered in the sound of its closing.

The flush that had come to her cheeks was still there as she went down the two steps into the hot sunshine again. The blue eyes were rather bright with repressed excitement, and the corners of the mouth drooped with a most contradictory depression.

"I wonder how I shall like it?" she said to herself. "She's rather dreadful! I did not think she would have treated me quite like that. But I shan't see much of her, after all, and I am glad to begin work. I hope the children will like me!"

With the last words she stopped a passing omnibus and got in.

CHAPTER II.

EVER since she had been fifteen it had been Richenda Leicester's dearest wish to "earn her living," as she had expressed it to Mrs. Fitzgerald. The wish had taken its rise in her first appreciation of the struggle which it had cost her father to make both ends of his small salary meet. Mr. Leicester had been the manager of a small branch bank in a little country town in the West of England. He had two hundred and fifty pounds a year, and a house much larger than the money could possibly keep up. His wife had died, leaving him with a boy of six; twin boys of three; and the little Richenda, who was ten. For the next few years poor Mr. Leicester's life had been a struggle with uncertain health—the little country town lay low, in a damp climate, and though he was not yet forty, chronic rheumatism had assailed him—the care of the four children, and the difficulty of managing a household which had no woman at the head of it.

The four children grew up in happy childish unconsciousness of their father's difficulties, griefs, or cares, until Richenda was fifteen. It was one day just after her birthday when, coming down late at night, unexpectedly, into the untidy dining-room to fetch a book, she found her father sitting

alone over the fire gazing desolately into its dying embers. There was something in the lonely figure which touched a hitherto quite unknown spring in the girlish heart. Very few women know the moment when they cross the dividing line between childhood and womanhood, but Richenda knew it and never forgot it. Then, in that moment, her whole position seemed changed. Instead of being the protected, the sheltered, she became, as far as her power would let her, the protector and the shelterer. She crossed the room; knelt down beside her father; and, with quick womanly sympathy, not only realised the difficulties of his life, but made him let her enter into them and share them. She had always been a loving child, and now she was a devoted daughter. She took the care of the house and of the younger children into her hands with a singleness of purpose that went as far as wider experience could have done. She threw aside the story-books of which she had been fond, and tried to work up her neglected education that she might teach the twins. By dint of great saving she made it possible for her father to send the elder boy to school.

It would be difficult to say, during the three years that followed, who had depended most upon Richenda's sympathy and help; her father or "the children," as Richenda called them. And when at the end of the three years poor Mr. Leicester died from the after effects of a violent attack of rheumatic fever, he left the three boys to Richenda's care with a smile of confidence that would have been a full reward, if Richenda had wanted one, for the devotion that had smoothed away the difficulties of his life. He was buried one cold snowy March day in the little country town churchyard, where the crocuses were just coming up through the grass; and when the funeral was over Richenda and the boys went back, a little lonely quartette, through the softly-falling snow to the great empty house which was to shelter them for so short a time longer now. They sat round the fire in their mourning dress, and talked over their plans. There was no one to advise them; no one to interfere with them. The only relative they had in the world, a cousin of their mother's, had been too old and infirm to come to the funeral, but he had done his part, nevertheless. He had written kindly, if stiffly, offering to help with the education and maintenance of the three boys, provided that Richenda could maintain herself until

such time as her brothers should be able to give her a home. Richenda had already, in her own mind, gratefully accepted his kindness. Jack, the eldest boy, whose one wish in life was to be a doctor, was to stay at the inexpensive school where his father had placed him, until he was old enough to begin his medical training. The twins, who were now eleven years old, she hoped to place at the grammar school of their native town. She was going to make arrangements for them to board with some friends who had known them all their lives, and who would be kind to them for their father's sake.

For herself her plans were equally definite. How to find out the best way of earning a living had cost the lonely girl many an hour of anxious thought. She was not, she well knew, educated enough for a governess, nor was there any special profession or trade for which she felt any aptitude. She had been almost in despair, when it occurred to her that the one pleasure of her life might be turned to account. This pleasure was the care of children. Richenda loved them as very

few girls do; and was, in return, always loved by them. In her anxious enquiries and searchings she had come across the name of an institute for training girls as children's nurses; and she decided to afford herself a year's training out of the slender fund which would be the result of the sale of such property as Mr. Leicester had possessed.

All this she told the three boys that evening. They met it as they would have met any plan of Richenda's—with the acquiescence arising from their loving belief in her. The twins gazed mournfully into the fire, and counted sadly and simultaneously the years that must pass before they could "have money enough to have Richie to live with them." Jack said nothing after his first approval. He only stood with his arm protectingly thrown round his sister's shoulders, and a thoughtful, hopeful look in his boyish eyes.

A week or two of packing up followed, and then the brothers and sister went their several ways in the world; the boys to their schools, Richenda to begin the training which had ended in her engagement by Mrs. Fitzgerald.

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